

12134 – 112th Avenue
Grand Haven, MI 49417
March 17, 2005

Joint House & Senate Transportation Committees
Rep. Philip LaJoy and Sen. Judson Gilbert, Chairs
Grand Region MDOT Offices
1420 Front Street NW
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am a resident of Ottawa County, a facilities manager for Grand Rapids Public Schools, and a volunteer with the Transportation Working Group of the West Michigan Environmental Action Council. I have been a student of transportation and urban planning since graduate school and continued my interest after graduating with an MPA in 1989. I am privileged to offer three points at this hearing on the **MDOT Five Year Plan**.

First, I believe that the recently adopted motto, "Preserve First," is extremely important to Michigan. My daily work is in the area of maintenance and I understand the maintenance person as the unsung hero of our society. Before any other priority we must keep the infrastructure we have safe and sound. Look at it this way: as a homeowner it would be foolish to ignore a leaking roof and instead spend money on an addition. It is the same with our roadway system.

Please do not try to fool the citizenry by claiming that the roads previously listed in "fair" condition, then reclassified as in "good" condition, are really good enough. True accountability can be obtained by tracking the statewide cost of car repair associated with rough roads: steering, alignment, etc. Let's really win back our reputation as a state known for good roads. Fix it first.

Second, fund transit up to the 10% constitutional limit. Adding this \$30 to \$50 million will make a huge difference to transit agencies like ITP *The Rapid* in metro Grand Rapids, and to the systems in Holland and Grand Haven. This change will slow down some road building, but it will not mean a negative impact on drivers. Increasing the portion of travelers who use transit will reduce the number of single-occupant vehicles presently clogging our highways.

Transit represents better transportation system efficiency—but transit has to have a certain critical level of investment to succeed. A good system starved for funds will not be good for long. But a good system properly supported will get better and better. Grand Rapids is an excellent case in point. Twice in the past few years the residents in the central city and the inner ring of suburbs have resoundingly approved millage votes. Ridership is soaring. Please stop cutting transit at the state level. Rather, increase funding to the 10% maximum—and include transit in all revenue enhancements, such as vehicle leasing. Then watch how well it works!

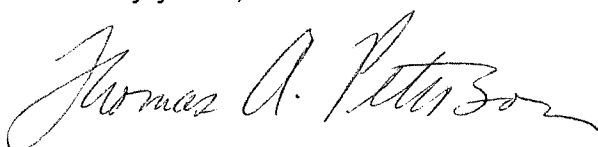
Adequate support of transit means citizens have choices. Right now, in too many communities in Michigan, citizens don't have any choice but the privately owned automobile. Since a surprisingly large percentage of citizens (over 20% in GR) do not have access to private vehicles, we are denying them full access to the goods, services, and benefits of civil society.

Third, improve planning and funding for non-motorized transportation. Livable communities start with walkable communities. Walkable neighborhoods cost much less to live in than auto-only neighborhoods. Safe pedestrian pathways are essential supports for transit. Providing safe bicycling facilities does not cost very much, even in auto dominated areas; and it is even cheaper in areas already designed to be pedestrian-friendly. Now, we have sidewalks that end at the bridge abutment. These stop people from walking to the other side of the river. We need to eliminate these bottlenecks. We will not be able to see the net effect of these transportation choices until we have a comprehensive network.

- This does not have to be every neighborhood of every city right now, but we have to have a plan and work toward its completion. All of the road repair projects should be cross-checked with non-motorized plans and every effort should be made to include the bike and ped improvements when doing other roadway work.
- CMAQ funds are used for pedestrian and bike improvements in other states, but have not been used this way in Michigan—at least not in the Grand Valley MPO. All we have available to us, according to our local planners, is Enhancement funds. If other states can do it, we can too. Here's a case in point: Recently two projects were added to the GVMC's non-motorized plan—sidewalks on 28th Street (one of the busiest retail stretches in the state, M-11). While these may be good projects, they bump out other projects previously identified as critical to the elimination of pedestrian and bicycling choke points—bottlenecks to network connections.

If these new sidewalk projects are done, the use of the new 28th St cross town bus will increase and congestion will be reduced. This project should be done! But we should not continuously substitute new projects for those that have been waiting so long for Enhancement funds. This perfectly fits the intention of CMAQ. This is an area where MDOT could help promote equitable use of federal categoricals.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Thomas A. Peterson". The signature is fluid and written in dark ink.

Thomas A. Peterson